

When the Holmes Brother's debut album was released last year it showed a group that knew what soul was all about. They backed it up too with great shows at the Barbary and the just released *Where It's At* (Rounder) proves the first was no fluke. From the first gorgeous gospel harmony of the Sam Cooke title track, you know you're hearing something great, and they repeat it again and again on ballads like "You Can't Hold On to a Love That's Gone" and "I've Been to the Well Before." As good as they are, they're better when they stick to originals or obscure covers. "Drown In My Own Tears" can't touch Ray Charles or Aretha and Hank Williams' "I Saw the Light" comes off as a joke. Lead singer, Wendell Holmes tends to get too jivey on the upbeat numbers, and they should let drummer Popsy Dixon whose falsetto on "Never Let Me Go" steals the album sing lead more often. Still the Holmes Brothers are as real as it gets and not to be missed.

The Holmes Brothers: Sat., Dec. 28 at 10 p.m. at the Ambler Cabaret, 43 East Butler Pike, Ambler, (cover varies), 646-4727.

--Peter Brown